Book Review/Compte rendu

Gøsta Esping-Andersen, *Incomplete Revolution: Adapting Welfare States to Women's New Roles*. Oxford: Polity Press, 2009, 214 pp. $27.95 paper (978-0-7456-4316-8), $83.95 hardcover (978-0-7456-4315-1)

Some years ago, Gøsta Esping-Andersen vowed to dedicate himself to anything but the welfare state. Luckily for sociologists and others interested in the changes and challenges of welfare states, he reneged on that vow.

The principal argument of this book, which is certain to be as enticing as it is controversial, is that the thus far incomplete revolution in women's roles is provoking serious disequilibria in societies. Arguing that the term "revolution" is appropriate to describe women's changed and changing roles, Esping-Andersen claims that well-established ways of being and doing have been turned upside-down. He argues that the women's revolution, incomplete as it is, may be the harbinger of new inequalities and possibly even deeper socioeconomic polarization. If this is so, then families and markets, in and of themselves, simply cannot manage. Hence, the need for, and reinvigorated interest in, the welfare state as the only social institution with the requisite capability.

Why is this an "incomplete revolution" in women's roles? Esping-Andersen explains that he chose that title to stress two things: the movement from one equilibrium to another, and the "sub-optimal outcomes" apparent in the incomplete transition, including very low fertility levels, and more polarization in family incomes and parental investments in children due to marital homogamy and unequal societal distribution of gender equality. This last point is crucial to the book's argument. If the dual-career norm is limited to, or more prevalent among, those at the top of the social pyramid, then the benefits of two incomes accrue to those couples whose marriages tend, on average, to be more stable (he argues), and who can afford to invest more in their children, as well as to save and plan for their own later years.

Esping-Andersen takes a life course perspective from the outset, making the strong case that life cycle stages must be seen as connected. He goes so far as to claim that pension reform begins with babies, while blushing at his venture into what he calls political sloganeering. That said, the life course perspective is key to the extent that widening in-

equalities from babyhood into old age result from differential gender equality across classes exacerbated by marital homogamy.

The emphasis on children and older adults, not as separate "interest groups" but as deeply connected over the life course, brings to the fore the need for creative welfare state interventions, of which many specific examples are helpfully provided. With respect to investments in children, Esping-Andersen worries greatly about the adequacy of the human capital model as policy which, he argues, benefits those in secondary and tertiary education who are already advantaged from childhood, while further disadvantaging those who need the boost in early childhood. To solve this, he recommends income redistribution in combination with noneconomic interventions to benefit disadvantaged children with excellent outside family care, so that learning will beget learning through their lives.

With respect to older adults and the challenges of pensions and retirement in aging societies, he acknowledges increasing diversity in later years, particularly the undemocracy of death that comes much earlier to those who are least well-off. Again, he sees life course understanding as the key. With greater equalities from birth, the older years become less problematic for policy. Barring the attainment of greater equality in the early years, in the short run he prescribes a basic income guarantee, a base-line pension for all. Happily for policy makers, he cites evidence amassed by John Myles that this would be surprisingly cheap to implement, adding a cost of less than 0.1 percent of GDP to the public purse in any EU country.

Incomplete Revolution is a rich book, well-written and well-argued both theoretically and empirically, with new insights on almost every page. It is like a tapestry woven with multicoloured threads of existing knowledge, from which a pattern emerges that is totally new, unexpected, and somewhat jarring. The picture is not a happy one of gender equality in the "good society," as has been portrayed in much sociological literature, but one of unstable equilibrium and suboptimal outcomes, including lack of serious attention to children and their differential opportunities, increasingly sharp polarizations in child investment and parenting among families, and a disconnect in the stages of the life cycle.

Esping-Andersen claims to be "no sociological Michelangelo," yet he provides a generous gift to sociologists in painting his version of the Sistine Chapel. In the wake of a sharp scolding of the social sciences generally, and sociology in particular, for failing to rise to the challenge of understanding the new social order, he suggests three explanations for our inadequacy. First, the scholarly tendency toward caution makes sociologists reluctant to see radical transformations for what they are. Few

have managed, he says, to move beyond "pasting a 'post' on the past." Second, disciplinary compartmentalization has led to blindness to the many components of transformation, and crucially, to explaining how they link. Third, the nonempirical proclivities of those who do engage in holistic analyses results in the uninspiring insight that everything is linked to everything else. We can all do well to model our sociological selves after Esping-Andersen and leap courageously into the breach of the "big questions" of social transformations, their explanations, and their interconnections with all the theoretical and empirical tools we can muster. If only we could also reach policymakers with our knowledge and recommendations.

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